

Artists Offer Seriously Strong Works

Written by Michael LoGuidice

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The two artists currently showing at Quad City Arts in The District take their art very seriously. The artist statements of Eric Mart and Christopher Bradshaw suggest that these men have a higher purpose in their work; they seem to create art not with joy but out of a sense of responsibility.

Mart's welded-metal sculptures seem inspired by his direct experiences. For example, *Mad Circle – RIBCO Experience* reminds me of some late nights at that establishment just down the plaza from the gallery. The piece is a single figure whirling on one foot, part dance, part martial-arts move. Mart uses scrap iron, springs, and spheres, and welds them together into a coherent figure. The proportions and motion are quite well done although not always realistic. Mart's works ask to be displayed outdoors yet have enough finish to be displayed indoors. Mart is using the fruits of Industrial America, iron and steel, to create his art.

One of the striking pieces Mart has done is *Adrenal Meltdown*, which is a cast face on a skeletal backbone, with welded-iron arms and legs, riding a bicycle. It sounds a bit crazy, but it really works.

And Mart shows a mastery over his medium. He succeeds in assembling different found objects and creating forms into cogent and coherent sculptures. *Thailand Raindance* is a good example, with figures locked in a martial-arts embrace. There is no need for translations to get the messages that these sculptures contain.

Yet Mart's artist statement reflects that this art is an extension of his world view, and he directs us what to do, rather than allowing us the freedom to choose: "I believe God created the earth, gave humanity a chance to sacrifice ourselves and refuel the elements present in the environment. We need to come together as creatures of the Earth, not stepping on anyone's toenails, holding hands with every race, religion, and gender. We were created as a pair, and as a family, to care for the garden. The creations I present this showing give me an opportunity to

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share my appreciation for our natural caring for the Earth.”

Christopher Bradshaw similarly believes his artwork serves a serious purpose: “Provoking one to think about a situation is what I strive to accomplish in art. Narrative can be held by metaphor and allow the viewer to bring ideas and thoughts to a piece. Each piece may say a different story to each individual and sometimes even inspire one to think further.”

Bradshaw has 22 oil paintings in this show, showing two distinct painting styles: landscape and allegorical vignette. By allegorical vignettes, I mean paintings with titles like *As Time Goes By*, *The Hand of Fate*, and *The Death of Cupid*.

These allegorical vignettes are a bit too literal for my taste. *The Drive of Opulence*, for example, shows a man painted in a primitive style driving what looks to be a 1920s-style roadster on a game board that appears to be on top of a building over which the top of New York City’s Chrysler building peeks. Adding to the game-board theme is a pair of dice in the lower right-hand corner. While some people like these symbolic works painted in a semi-primitive style, Bradshaw’s draftsmanship needs improvement if he is going for the surrealistic look.

My favorites are the landscape works, reminding me of the Dutch landscape paintings of the 17th Century artists such as Jan van Goyen. Bradshaw’s work has an atmospheric quality but it does not share the bright colors of the Impressionist painters. His somber color palette is what recalls the Dutch landscape school, without the sharp rendering of Rembrandt or van Ruisdael. *Westward Bound* shows this “dark and stormy night” color palette. It is a pleasant, peaceful painting of a bi-wing airplane flying into a cloud-filled sky, and the work showcases Bradshaw’s strengths.

The artworks in this show are strong, but I prefer Mart’s evocative sculptures over Bradshaw’s sometimes too-literal paintings. If you’re in The District or enjoy sculpture, this is a show worth checking out.